

# For the Range NCOIC, A Skidgel Hall Curriculum Is Not a Requirement

by Sergeant First Class Myron F. Wong

With evening LOGPAC, prep to fire checks, and boresighting complete, you and your crew make your way to the location of the evening range safety briefing. On the way to the safety briefing, you find yourself mentally reviewing topics covered at the Tank Crew Evaluator (TCE) After Action Review (AAR) that followed your grueling Tank Table VII day run earlier in the day.

Finally, everybody assembles at the designated briefing location, which overlooks the range course roads. The Range Safety Officer (RSO) begins his safety briefing. During the briefing, the RSO mentions that there is a potential risk of tank crews getting disoriented during the night run and inadvertently traveling deep into the impact area. To mitigate this risk, the RSO mentions that the course route, battle positions, and firing points are marked by chem-lights.

Upon hearing this bit of comforting news, you and several of your tanker brethren glance out across the range only to discover that no chem-lights are lit. Worse, only 15 minutes remain before the range control mandated cease-fire time is over. You realize it requires special clearance from range control to go down range to mark the route with chem-lights after the mandatory cease-fire time is up, which will negatively impact the hot status of neighboring ranges.

Unable to contain himself any longer, a fellow tanker interrupts the briefing. "Excuse me, sergeant, but I don't see any chem-lights out there." A little angered at the interruption, the RSO squelches the growing mumbling amongst the firing crews with a short burst of "Look, when I'm finished with my briefing, I'll take it up with the Mike Golf [master gunner]."

Sound familiar? I submit that tankers have experienced this and other range-



related snafus a few more times than we care to admit. I further submit that, accompanying nearly all of these snafus, there is a tanker who chimes in with "I'm not the Mike Golf. He's Sergeant So-and-So."

Regardless of how competent and proficient a master gunner might be, he is only one person. As such, he should not be responsible for everything on the range. Two distinct NCOs must work together to run a tank or Bradley gunnery range, the range NCOIC and the company master gunner. Their responsibilities should complement each other and result in a tank table that is easier to plan, execute, and, probably most importantly, to adjust during execution. This article will explore the duties, responsibilities, and requirements of a range NCOIC, a position that does not require a Skidgel Hall curriculum.

The company/battalion master gunner mainly concentrates on all aspects of gunnery training on the range: scenario planning, targetry and firing locations, TCE training and monitoring, firing system problems, identifying crew trends or problem areas, re-runs, and so on. Basically, he is free to implement the training he received at the Master Gunner Course.

The range NCOIC takes care of nearly all other range requirements and functions needed on a tank range — all those administrative obligations that allow execution of the range. He does not have to be a school-trained master gunner, but he should be familiar with such things as troop leading procedures, problem-solving techniques, backwards planning, and pre-execution checks. It is important that the range NCOIC has a proactive frame of mind about his role: together with the company master gunner, **he owns the range.**

The range NCOIC is not only responsible for the execution, but for all relevant events prior to his range, as well as battle hand-over of his range to another unit or tear-down once his company is through. Examples of these requirements include things like drawing and testing cassette tapes and tape players, emplacing and testing communication equipment, pre-stocking any needed chem-lights, deconflicting ammunition drops and residue pick-ups, outside support of medical personnel and vehicles, heavy equipment transport times, interacting with range control, and so on.

Though the range NCOIC may delegate tasks, he is the coordinator, point of con-

tact, and enforcer of everything affecting the operation of his range.

The range NCOIC and company/battalion master gunner must act as a team, conferring with each other during the planning, execution, and recovery from a particular range. This division of labor safeguards any one individual from being overcome by all the things that must occur before, during, and after a tank company/battalion is on a range. For example, if a company/battalion master gunner is trying to troubleshoot a problem found during the screening of a tank and crew, he should not have to worry about a range guard not being present for duty. Likewise, a range NCOIC doesn't need to be a Master Gunner Course graduate to ensure that chem-lights are on hand for the night portion of his range, or to plan for the positioning of those chem-lights during the evening mandatory cease-fire time.

The range NCOIC must not merely rest on his laurels because things are specified in the battalion gunnery order. For example, the battalion gunnery order may specify that the S3 will coordinate for delivery of ammunition on the NCOIC's range. In this example, after reviewing the battalion gunnery order, the range NCOIC coordinates with the support platoon sergeant to identify himself as the man in charge of the range where the ammunition will be delivered, confirm the delivery date and time, identify initially where the ammunition will be delivered on the range, who will meet the cargo truck when it arrives, confirm the residue pick-up date and time, and coordinate with the unit or element tasked with a guard force. Additionally, following the idea of pre-execution checks, if changes are made to the original schedule and coordination, regardless of who in the battalion made the change, that range NCOIC will re-confirm/coordinate those changes, because those changes have an impact on his range.

Prior to the execution of a tank range, the range NCOIC should conduct a battalion range briefing. Attendees at this briefing should include the battalion commander, the S3, the battalion command sergeant major, the operations sergeant major, and the battalion master gunner. Additionally, each company commander, company 1SG, and company master gunner should attend. Fi-



nally, from HHC or the Forward Support Company, the support platoon leader and sergeant, medic platoon leader and sergeant, scout platoon leader and sergeant, mortar platoon leader and sergeant, and the maintenance officer/technician/NCO should attend this briefing. Others may attend if they wish. During this briefing, the range NCOIC will brief all aspects of his range using a briefing board (butcher board) as a visual aid, and a briefing book. The range NCOIC will give the briefing book to the members of the head table to review while he is conducting his range brief. The briefing board will mirror very closely the briefing book. Emphasis for these briefing aids will be on content and functionality, rather than on

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what people may term as "excessive cheese." While "cheese" goes a long way towards fostering unit pride, displaying one's "doctoral degree in PowerPoint" does not replace considerations such as identifying the need and number of tape players, cassette tapes, the power source for those tape players, and the PMCS of the items. This range briefing will constitute the final command review of the range conduct and the training slated for that range. The range NCOIC focuses on the range conduct and the master gunner focuses on the training slated for that range. It does not replace any specified

IPRs or command-level range recons. Specific members of the audience will assist with or reinforce topics raised during the brief if required. The fact that the range NCOIC is giving the brief reinforces that he owns the range and is therefore responsible for the conduct of the range. Members of the head table may call for a subsequent briefing by the range NCOIC if the number and complexity of changes made during this briefing make it necessary. Upon completion of the briefing, the briefing board now becomes a visual aid for the range reporting NCO, and the briefing book becomes a reference for the range NCOIC. If this briefing book is thorough, the range NCOIC can be swapped out at the last minute. After reviewing this briefing book, the replacement will have an easier time continuing with the conduct of the tank range.

Briefing board contents will include the following:

- Key range personnel, support personnel, the rotation plan if listing subsequent names is not feasible, and names of soldiers and vehicle bumper numbers from slice element support, such as engineers and additional medic support. Examples of key personnel might include the OIC, the range NCOIC, the master gunner, and the RSO. Support personnel might include medics, maintenance teams, and the civilian range crew POC.
- Goals for the firing crews.
- Range layout, which includes not only the target and firing locations, but more importantly, course routes and return routes, marshaling areas, maintenance areas, AAR locations, TCE locations, medic locations, and so on. This is obviously going to require input from the master gunner. Remember that the range NCOIC and the master gunner are a team.
- Time lines prior to the range execution, during execution, and after the unit is done with the range, such as equipment cleaning and turn-in times, cleaning teams, and so on. Planning for the recovery from a tank gunnery range is just as

## Tank and Bradley Gunnery Ranges

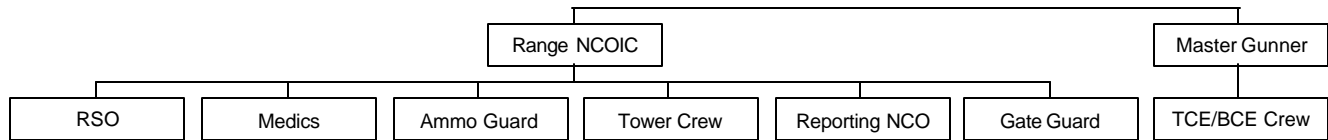


Figure 1.

This illustrates the relationship of range personnel for tank and Bradley gunnery ranges. This will work well at the company (sub-tables) and battalion (Table VIII, XI, and XII) level ranges. The maintenance team is not shown in this diagram. Though the maintenance team does not specifically work for either the range NCOIC or the master gunner, both of these NCOs interact with that team. The Range NCOIC declares where organizational maintenance activities can take place on the range after coordinating with the civilian range crew POC or Range Control. The master gunner works hand in hand with the maintenance team when troubleshooting serious maintenance problems, which may verify a possible alibi. The master gunner is now free to exercise all of the things he was taught at the Master Gunner Course.

important as all the things leading up to and including the execution of the range. As such, this should not be overlooked or taken lightly.

- Necessary equipment and coordinating information, such as tape players, range flag, TCE score sheets, and so on.
- Risk assessments and risk reduction measures relevant to that range and that unit.

The briefing book will mirror the contents of the briefing board page for page, but will include the following:

- Gate Guard Script. Some may think this is ridiculous. I submit to you that this soldier is the first to make contact with non-firing visitors that come onto a particular range. As such, how the gate guard carries himself will go a long way towards setting the tone for any visitor to a tank range. First impressions are hard to change. However, the range NCOIC must guard against turning this gate guard into some sort of pre-reporting NCO. Contents of the script should focus on what unit is on the range, what tank table is being fired, any safety considerations (for example, where to get ear plugs), who is the reporting NCO, and where to go on the range to meet the reporting NCO. If the gate guard can convey this

information in a confident and forceful manner, it will go a long way towards setting a positive tone for any potential visitors to a tank range.

- Copies of memorandums or hand receipts that apply to the necessary equipment and coordinating information, including key names and phone numbers.
- Miscellaneous items, which can include copies of range usage forms, range control hand receipts, training and support center (TSC) hand receipts, safety briefing script, chow requests, and so on.

A checklist of responsibilities for the range NCOIC and the company master gunner, as well as examples of a battalion range briefing book and briefing board should be created and remain on hand as a guide at the company and battalion S3 level. I further recommend that these tools be easy to slightly modify as necessary for different ranges. Or keep one briefing book and board on hand for each range. Still, the idea here is to work smarter, not harder.

With minor modifications, one can see how this concept can be adapted to small arms ranges. In that case, the principal NCO is the range NCOIC, and a supporting armorer replaces the master gunner.

In a normal tank company, excluding the first sergeant, there are at least nine NCOs. I wrote this article to identify one technique these high-speed NCOs can use to be proactive and take the initiative in helping the Mike Golf run the tank range — a technique that does not require these NCOs to be Skidgel Hall alumni.

I used *FM 25-101, Battle Focused Training* and *FM 17-12-1-1&2, Tank Gunnery* as references for this article.

SFC Myron F. Wong is currently platoon trainer on the Armor Task Force Observer-Controller Team (Cobras), NTC. His previous assignments include platoon sergeant, platoon leader, and assistant battalion operations NCO. He scored a perfect 1000-point Tank Table VIII on an M1A1, is a member of the USAREUR Sergeant Morales Club, received Superior and Distinguished ratings on M1A1 Tank Table XII, and qualified an M1A2 platoon on Tank Table VIII. He has run numerous tank tactical and gunnery tables and small arms ranges as the range NCOIC.

## Small Arms Ranges

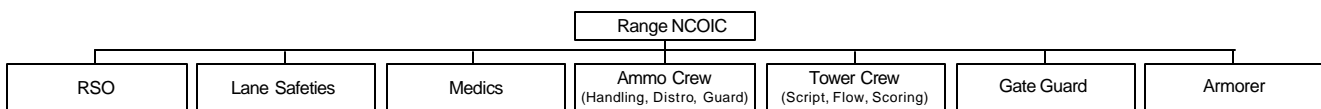


Figure 2.

This chart illustrates minor changes for use on small arms ranges. The master gunner is replaced by an armorer, who in turn works for the Range NCOIC. Lane safeties may be required, depending on the size of the range. The ammo crew now has the additional task of loading magazines for pistol and rifle ranges. With the elimination of TCEs and BCEs, scoring must be accomplished by other range personnel. One technique is to have part of the tower crew perform this task.